Nixon, in Seclusion, Described

By Howard Seelye
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SAN CLEMENTE, Calif.—Richard M. Nixon, in virtual seclusion since resigning the presidency, is described by friends who have seen him recently as "tired, fatalistic and preoccupied with his legal problems."

One long-time friend said that Mr. Nixon is taking his fall from power pretty hard, but seemed to him to be "okay physically and mentally." Another political friend and associate who visited Mr. Nixon here a few days ago, discounted rumors that the former President is suffering from major emotional problems.

"There is nothing to the report that he has been acting in an errant or unusual way," he said.

Because the embattled former President has chosen to become a recluse behind his white-walled estate in San Clemente, recurrent rumors and reports have arisen in regard to his physical and mental well-being.

Efforts to contact Mr. Nixon's associates have been largely unsuccessful, and most of those who have been closest to him during his 28-year political career are reluctant to talk about the former President. Those who do have asked not to be identified.

Some old friends who stood by Mr. Nixon during the long Watergate ordeal have not been invited to San Clemente and, in some cases, have been unable to talk to him on the telephone. Herbert G. Klein, former communications director for Mr. Nixon and now an executive with Metromedia, Inc., in Los Angeles, says that "Everyone I've talked to says that Mr. Nixon is on top of things and that he is assessing his problems realistically." Others who have talked to former Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler quote him as saying that Mr. Nixon "is coming along fine."

Until Wednesday, when he reportedly took a brief auto ride before being served with two subpoenas to testify in the Watergate cover-up trial and in a civil case, Mr. Nixon had apparently ventured from San Clemente only twice since returning Aug. 9—once for a drive south and once for a picnic on a beach in Ventura. Both trips here soon after his departure from the White House.

Since that time he has remained on the estate he bought in 1969, six months after he took office as President.

Accompanying him from Washington, and serving as aides, have been Ziegler, former Appointments Secretary Stephen Bull; a military aide, Marine Corps Lt. Col. Jack Brennan, and a handful of secretaries and other assistants.

The Nixons' long-time personal servants, Manolo and Fina Sanchez, also are on hand in San Clemente.

According to friends, Mr. Nixon is spending his time working on two basic problems—his personal financial situation and the legal problems confronting him.

One estimated the former President spends $10,000 a month for mortgage payments, staff salaries and legal expenses, not counting personal living expenses.

"He has a lot of personal decisions to make—about what real estate properties to keep and other such matters," another friend said.

Also, it has been reported that a number of employment offers have been made to Mr. Nixon, but that he

as 'Fatalistic, Preoccupied'

nas decided not to practice law.

One report being circulated in Washington indicates that Mr. Nixon will be engaged as a contributing editor to Readers Digest at a salary in excess of $100,000 a year.

In addition, it is rumored that Mr. Nixon will sell his memoirs, collecting a multimillion-dollar advance to help him through his current financial difficulties.

But efforts to obtain confirmation or denial of any of these reports or to gain contact at all with he persons still close to the former President, have been mostly fruitless.

Secretaries answering Ziegler's phone report either that "this is not a press office," or that Ziegler is "in a meeting and will be tied up most of the day."

Ziegler stayed at the Surf and Sand Hotel in Laguana Beach when he first returned to California with Mr. Nixon, but since then has rented a house close to Mr. Nixon's home.

Apparently Mr. Nixon works daily in an office in the house rather than spending his time at the government compound on the adjacent Coast Guard base.

Despite reports of fatigue and mental exhaustion, Mr. Nixon is said by close friends to maintain a schedule of physical exercise, with daily dips in the pool at his home and occasional strolls on the beach.

But there are some contradictions concerning his condittion.

One friend says it is his feeling that Mr. Nixon knows what happened to him, but can't figure out why.

One explanation given for his decision to disappear from public view is that he hasn't yet made up his mind what to say about Watergate matters, particularly in view of legal complications facing him and that he does not want to engage in small talk with friends or discuss Watergate or his resignation.

In some outward respects, however, conditions at San Clemente haven't changed since Mr. Nixon left the White House and returned to the place he now calls home.

At the entrance to the government compound next to Mr. Nixon's home, where once the heads of foreign states and key leaders of the U.S. government conferred on important matters, two government guards still man the gate. Adjacent to the gate there is a hired security guard.

Hundreds of cars turn off Avenida del Presidente each day in a futile attempt to see the Nixon home, which is hidden by tences and heavy shrubbery.

Inside the exclusive residential community, along Calle Ariana a large flower garden bordering the six-foot-high, Spanish-style stucco wall surrounding Mr. Nixon's house has been allowed to deteriorate, causing concern among some residents.

Paul Presley, former San Clemente councilman and part-owner of the San Clemente Inn, has organized a work party of young men from the area to clean out the weeds.

Presley emphasized, however, that Mr. Nixon is not aware of the effort, but said there is no objection on the part of Nixon staff people.

Outside the residential and government area, an Associated Press photographer carries on a lonely vigil, waiting for something newsworthy to record.